

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W  
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O P 181208Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4292

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USUN NEW YORK 196

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3158

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS DIA; BEIRUT ALSO PASS BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIA AMBIVALENT OVER FURTHER SINAI STEP

1. SUMMARY: SYRIA VIEWS PROSPECT OF FURTHER INTERIM  
ACCORD ON SINAI WITH AMBIVALENCE BUT ALSO WITH MORE EQUANIMITY  
TODAY THAN IT DID LAST WINTER. A BETTER UNDERSTANDING WITH CAIRO

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HAS INCREASED SYRIAN SELF-CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE NEGOTIATING

PROCESS IN GENERAL AS HAS DAMASCUS' SUCCESS AT CONSOLIDATING ITS RELATIONS WITH LEBANON, JORDAN AND ARAB OIL STATES. PROSPECT OF FURTHER EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ACCORD HAS WARMED UP SYRIAN-PLO TIES. PLO CAN COUNT ON CONTINUANCE OF SYRIA'S MILITANT SUPPORT, INCLUDING THAT FOR CAMPAIGN TO OUST ISRAEL FROM UN. INTERNAL SECURITY SCENE IS CALM WITH NO EVIDENCE OF SIGNIFICANT DISSIDENCE, ALTHOUGH IRAQI INTENTIONS REMAIN SUSPECT. SYRIAN-SOVIET TIES ARE EXCELLENT. ECONOMY IS PROSPERING ALTHOUGH CRITICAL MANPOWER SHORTAGES ARE DEVELOPING. US-SYRIAN ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL RELATIONS ARE THRIVING AND OUR OVERALL BILATERAL TIES ARE SATISFACTORY. DAMASCUS AWAITS ITS TURN IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS DEEPLY SKEPTICAL OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS. END SUMMARY

2. ON EVE SECRETARY'S RETURN TO AREA AND PRESUMPTIVE CONCLUSION OF FURTHER INTERIM ACCORD ON SINAI, ATMOSPHERE IN DAMASCUS IS MARKEDLY CALMER THAN LAST FEBRUARY/MARCH. IMPROVEMENT IN SYRIA'S KEY RELATIONSHIP WITH CAIRO IS PART OF EXPLANATION. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO CAPITALS IS BETTER THAN LAST WINTER EVEN THOUGH CAIRO HAS NOT BEEN SHARING DETAILS OF ITS NEGOTIATIONS. SYRIANS EXPRESS MORE CERTAINTY RE SADAT'S WILLINGNESS TO TIE NEW SINAI AGREEMENT TO SUBSEQUENT GOLAN NEGOTIATIONS. DAMASCUS ALSO HAS MORE CONFIDENCE IN US INTENTIONS TO BE HELPFUL RE GOLAN. ALTHOUGH SYRIA RETAINS STRONG PREFERENCE FOR A "SIMULTANEOUS STEP ON ALL FRONTS,". IT HAS SHOWN NO INTENT TO ATTEMPT BLOCK OR SABOTAGE NEW SINAI ACCORD.

3. ARAB RELATIONS: DURING PAST SIX MONTHS SARG HAS INVESTED CONSIDERABLE ENERGY IN CONSOLIDATING AND BROADENING ITS TIES WITH OTHER ARAB STATES EXCEPT THOSE WITH BAGHDAD WHICH CONTINUE VENOMOUS. SYRO-JORDANIAN LINKS IN PARTICULAR HAVE DEVELOPED WITH SURPRISING SPEED. DAMASCUS APPARENTLY HAS NOT PRESSED HARD ON SENSITIVE ISSUES SUCH AS GOJ PERMISSION FOR RESTORATION OF FEDAYEEN PRESENCE OR EVEN FOR PLO TO PLAY LARGER POLITICAL ROLE ON EAST BANK. RECENT AGREEMENTS ON EXPANDED ECONOMIC COOPERATION PROMISE BENEFITS TO BOTH PARTIES. CLEAR INCENTIVE EXISTS FOR INCREASED MILITARY COOPERATION, GIVEN SYRO-JORDANIAN ASSESSMENT THAT NORTHERN JORDAN COULD BE LIKE ISRAELI INVASION ROUTE TO SYRIA.

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BUT MILITARY CONSULTATIONS HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN LIMITED. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF IMMINENT CREATION OF A JOINT MILITARY COMMAND. WE ALSO HAVE NO REPORTS THAT SYRIA IS PRESSING AMMAN TO LOOK TO SOVIETS TO MEET ITS MILITARY EQUIPMENT NEEDS.

4. SYRIA RESPONDED TO LEBANESE CRISIS WITH CONSTRUCTIVE MEDIATION. IT HELPED RESTORE A MEASURE OF CALM TO

THAT COUNTRY. WHILE SOME ISRAELIS HAVE SPECULATED THAT DAMASCUS UNDERTOOK THIS ACTIVITY WITH AN EYE TO EVENTUAL RESTORATION OF "GREATER SYRIA," WE SENSE NO GRANDIOSE APPETITE HERE. RATHER, SYRIAN ACTIONS HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY SHORT-TERM GOAL OF CONTAINING GOLA-PALESTINIAN TENSIONS. FURTHER DETERIORATION IN THAT RELATIONSHIP WOULD CONFRONT DAMASCUS WITH EMBARRASSING CHOICES. PRIMMIN KARAME'S LAUDATORY COMMENTS ABOUT ASAD'S STATESMANSHIP UNDERLINED VALUE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP SEES IN CULTIVATING CLOSER TIES HERE.

5. OIL STATES: SAUDI CROWN PRINCE FAHD'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS LAST WEEK BROUGHT APPARENT SUCCESS FOR SAUDI DIPLOMACY BY LOOSENING SYRO-IRAQI DEADLOCK OVER EUPHRATES WATERS. HOWEVER, SYRIA REGARDS THAT DISPUTE AS ONLY ONE MANIFESTATION OF INTRA-BAATH RIVALRIES AND AS IN ITSELF OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE. SYRIA' WARM PRIASE OF SAUDIS, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE READ AS PART OF SYRIAN CAMPAIGN TO CULTIVATE RIYADH. THIS IS TO INSURE SAG'S CONTINUED POLITICAL BACKING FOR DAMASCUS'S GOAL THAT SYRIA BE A FULL PARTNER IN ON-GOING ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. FONMIN KHADDAM ON HIS RECENT VISIT TO KUWAIT PRESUMABLY REMINDED HIS HOSTS OF SAME GOAL. HE ALSO ALLEGEDLY DISCUSSED REVIVING ARAB OIL EMBARGO IF PACE OF PEACE TALKS WAS NOT SPEEDED UP (WHEN THIS SUBJECT REPORTEDLY RAISED WITH FAHD, CROWN PRINCE IS SAID TO HAVE AGREED IT COULD PROPERLY BE DISCUSSED AT NEXT ARAB SUMMIT.)

6. PLO: MODERATES IN PLO LEADERSHIP HAVE NO MORE CONSISTENT FRIEND IN ARAB WORLD THAN DAMASCUS. CERTAIN PALESTINIANS FEAR TO JEOPARDIZE THEIR MOVEMENT'S FUTURE AUTONOMY BY TOO CLOSE A RELATIONSHIP WITH ANY ARAB STATE. THIS HAS UP TO NOW SLOWED PROGRESS ON PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE OF ASAD'S

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MARCH PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT SYRO-PALESTINIAN MILITARY/POLITICAL COMMAND. (SYRIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THIS PROSPECTIVE PARTNERSHIP IN FACT IS VERY MUCH THAT OF SENIOR TO JUNIOR.) NO AGREEMENTS HAVE YET EMERGED FROM THE PERIODIC MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES PLANNING FOR JOINT COMMAND. STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE PALESTINIAN CENTRAL COUNCIL THIS PAST WEEKEND IN DAMASCUS, HOWEVER, STRONGLY ATTACKING ANOTHER SINAI ACCORD AND CALLING FOR EARLY CREATION OF THE JOING COMMAND, DEMONSTRATES THAT PALESTINIAN FEAR ABOUT BEING SOLD OUT BY EGYPT IS SERVING TO DRIVE THE PLO EVER CLOSER TO DAMASCUS. WARNING BY PLO OFFICIAL, SAIQA'S ZUHAIR MUHSIN, THAT FURTHER INTERMIM ACCORD ON SINAI COULD LEAD TO FOURTH ROUND IN LEBANESE INTERNAL CONFLICT MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN PLANTED BY SARG. IT IN ANY CASE SERVED SYRIA'S INTEREST BY REMINDING CAIRO, JERUSALEM AND US THAT SERIOUS TROUBLE LIES

AHEAD IF PALESTINIAN INTERESTS ARE NEGLECTED IN ON-GOING NEGOTIATIONS

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED DIA.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O P 181208Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4293

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3158

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS DIA; BEIRUT ALSO PASS BAGHDAD

7. SARG HAS REFUSED DEFINE CONTENTS OF ITS CALL FOR  
"RESTORATION OF LEGITIMATE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL RIGHTS."  
THESE RIGHTS APPEAR TO INCLUDE CREATION OF WEST BANK/  
GAZA STATE AS FIRST TERRITORIAL ENTITY WITH INDEFINITE TIME

LIMIT. SYRIA WILL SUSTAIN ITS SUPPORT FOR PLO PROGRAMS, INCLUDING CAMPAIGN AT LIME TO WIN RESOLUTION CALLING FOR OUSTER OF ISRAEL FROM UN. SYRIA IS THUS IN AMBIVALENT POSITION OF TRYING  
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PRESERVE GOOD TIES WITH CAIRO AND MAINTIANING ITS OWN FELT NEED TO SUPPORT THE PLO. FOR EXAMPLE SYRIAN MEDIA HAS UNDERLINED DAMASCUS "DISAPPOINTMENT" OVER EGYPTIAN PERFORMANCE AT KAMPALA IN REFUSING SUPPORT RESOLUTION FOR OUSTER. IT HAS LEFT MUCH MORE STRIDENT CRITICISMS TO BE VOICED BY PLO LEADERSHIP IN BEIRUT.

8. RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW CONTINUE EXCELLENT WITH NO DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT S IN RECENT MONTHS. BOTH PARTIES SEE IT IN THEIR INTEREST TO MINIMIZE FRICTIONS INHERENT IN SYRIA'S NEAR TOTAL DEPENDENCE ON MOSCOW FOR MILITARY SUPPLIES. THE ESTIMATED SOVIET 2,500 MILITARY ADVISORS IN COUNTRY MAINTIAN LOWEST OF PROFILES. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SYRIANS ARE INTERESTED IN MAKING LIMITED AND SPECIALIZED PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM WESTERN SOURCES, (HELICOPTERS, COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT, SMALL NAVAL VESSELS) MAINLY FROM FRANCE, BUT ALSO U.S. HOWEVER, THEIR PRINCIPAL SUPPLIER WILL REMAIN THE USSR. DAMASCUS, WHILE ZEALOUS ABOUT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS FOREIGN POLICY, WILL DO NOTHING TO ANTAGANIZE THE SOVIETS WHICH MIGHT THREATEN ITS SUPPLY LINES.

9. SYRIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY WAS STRENGTHENED IN JUNE BY BREAKUP OF TERRORIST RING RESPONSIBLE FOR BOMBINGS HERE OVER PAST YEAR. ARREST AND SWIFT HANGING OF ARAB COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION LEADERS HAS RESTORED CONFIDENCE OF SARG'S SECURITY FORCES. SARG KEEPS WATCHFUL EYE ON POSSIBILITY OF SUBVERSION FROM BAGHDAD BUT THERE IS NO CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF IRAQ MAKING HEADWAY IN SUBORNING KEY MILITARY OR CIVILIAN ELEMENTS. MAJOR UNITS OF SYRIAN ARMY REMAIN IN EASTERN AND NORTHERN DESERTS, OSTENSIBLY TO PREVENT IRAQI INVASION. THEIR CHANGE IN MISSION FROM SERVING AS GOLAN REINFORCEMENTS TO CONFRONTING IRAQ WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED AS SIGNAL TO SYRIAN PUBLIC OPINION THAT THAT CRISIS IS TRULY SEVERE AND TO IRAQIS THAT DAMASCUS WOULD WELCOME CHANGES IN IRAQI REGIME.

10. ASAD'S PERSONAL LEADERSHIP SEEMS BROADLY ACCEPTED BY KEY SECTORS OF POPULATION. ACTIONS BY REGIONAL PARTY CONGRESS IN APRIL SUGGESTED SOME EROSION IN PRESIDENT'S CONTROL OF PARTY MECHANISM WHEN TWO OF HIS MOST  
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TRUSTED LIEUTENANTS WERE REMOVED FROM PLACES ON COMMAND. HOWEVER, JULY'S NATIONAL COMMAND ELECTIONS RECTIFIED THIS AND APPEAR TO HAVE RUBBER STAMPED PRESIDENTIAL POLICIES. THERE IS NO HINT THAT EITHER CIVILIAN OR MILITARY ELEMENTS IN PARTY ARE TRYING TO RESTRICT PRESIDENTIAL NEGOTIATING AUTHORITY.

11. SYRIAN ECONOMY LOOKS INCREASINGLY PROMISING WITH HARVESTS APPARENTLY BETTER THAN AVERAGE. HOWEVER, BOTTLENECKS IN OVERALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ARE RAPIDLY DEVELOPING CAUSED BY CRITICAL MANPOWER SHORTAGES. THIS HAS LED GOVERNMENT TO LIMIT EMIGRATION PARTICULARLY OF TRAINED PERSONNEL, INCLUDING THIS YEAR'S UNIVERSITY GRADUATES AND EVEN UNRWA-TRAINED PALESTINIAN ARTISANS. SYRIAN LEADERSHIP OPENLY DISCUSSES PROBLEMS IT FACES ALLOCATING RESOURCES BETWEEN GUNS AND BUTTER AND IS UNHAPPY ABOUT BURDENS OF MILITARY EXPENDITURES. INTERNAL COORDINATION OF SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY IS LAMENTABLE AND WILL BE FURTHER BRAKE ON RAPID DEVELOPMENT.

12. OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE DEVELOPING SATISFACTORILY. SYRIAN INTEREST IN US EQUIPMENT AND KNOW-HOW IS HIGH. LAST YEAR'S SIGNIFICANT CONTRACTS FOR AIRCRAFT AND LOCOMOTIVES HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED THIS YEAR BY OFFSHORE OIL EXPLORATION CONTRACT WITH US COMPANY AND THERE ARE GOOD POSSIBILITIES OF OTHERS TO FOLLOW. US EXHIBITORS AT DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR REPORT THEY ARE EXTREMELY PLEASED WITH RESPONSIVENESS OF SYRIAN OFFICIALDOM AND PRIVATE SECTOR AND LOOK FORWARD TO MAJOR SALES. COMMERCIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF US ARMS MANUFACTURERS ARE RECEIVING FEELERS ON SALE OF SOME MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND SEVERAL HAVE TOLD US THAT SALES CLIMATE APPEARS PROMISING IF US LICENSES CAN BE APPROVED. RECENT AMERICAN CONGRESSIONAL AND HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS VISITORS HAVE RECEIVED CONSISTENTLY WARM WELCOME FROM SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WHICH IS KEENLY INTERESTED IN PUBLICIZING BOTH ITS

POLITICAL GOALS AND ITS DESIRE FOR CLOSER ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH US. WHILE RESULTS OF SECRETARY'S ONGOING PEACE EFFORTS WILL DETERMINE OVERALL ATMOSPHERE OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, WORD IN MEANWHILE IS OUT WITHIN SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TO EXPLORE EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR CLOSER US/SYRIAN COOPERATION.

13. ISRAEL AND GOLAN. WE BELIEVE THIS LEADERSHIP WILL ENTER-  
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TAIN PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER INTERIM STEP BENEFITTING SYRIA. IT WILL DO UTMOST AVOID ANY HINT THAT SYRIA IS NOT EQUALLY ZEALOUS ABOUT PALESTINIAN CONCERNS. DAMASCUS HAS ABSORBED ISRAELI PUBLIC STATEMENTS RE GOLAN AND PLO DURING RECENT MONTHS AND ASSUMES ISRAELIS TO BE IN REALITY JUST AS RIGID

AS THEIR STATEMENTS SOUND. THUS THIS CAPITAL IS EXTREMELY  
SKEPTICAL IT WILL RECEIVE AN ACCEPTABLE ISRAELI PROPOSAL  
ABOUT GOLAN OR THAT ISRAEL WILL SOON ADMIT PLO TO NEGOTIATIONS.  
MURPHY

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED DIA

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## Message Attributes

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